

NH Air Guard Security Team Excels in Kirkuk

Note: The following dispatch was emailed from Master Sgt. Peter Vatistas, squad leader for 12 members of the 157th Air Refueling Wing's Security Forces Squadron who are deployed to the 506th Expeditionary Security Forces Squadron, Kirkuk, Iraq. They deployed to Iraq in early September for approximately six months. Another group of 13 airmen from the 157th Security Force Squadron are deployed to Kuwait. Currently, the NH National Guard has about 200 soldiers and airmen deployed in Iraq and other locations in the Middle East and around the world in support of the war on terrorism.



I will start this article by stating that I cannot be prouder of a military unit more than I am of the one I belong to. The 157th Security Forces Squadron is, without a doubt, the best in the world. "Any time... Anywhere." Our squadron motto says it all and we have proven it time and time again.

When the word went out via telephone recall that we needed to send a twelve-man team to Iraq for a six-month tour, we 15 NH Air National Guard Security Force members volunteered within the first twenty minutes. They were told that they would be placed in harms way. They were told that the conditions might be

rougher than usual. They were told that they would not see their loved ones at home for six months.

The dispatcher who was tasked with making the calls stopped after calling about twenty people because he had fifteen names on the "Yes" list.

If anyone questions my team's core values, they had better bring reinforcements. They are among the most dedicated individuals I've ever met. They are trying to perform at 100 percent, and they are exceeding everyone's expectations.

Kirkuk Air Base is a joint force, coalition base - Army, Air Force and Iraqi Air Force all peacefully coexist here. Security is divided into three sectors: Alpha, Bravo and Gator. The dodgiest place to be is the Gator sector. This is where the base meets the hazards of Iraq. The main gate and the contractor gate both belong in the Gator Sector. Guess where the 157th is!

Since being here, we have endured one mortar attack, one rocket attack and one Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Device (VBIED) attack. The VBIED attack was at the contractor gate. Four of the 157th members were directly involved with security actions at when the attack occurred. Security was re-established within twenty minutes of the explosion, and normal operations were resumed within two hours. This was, by the way, the first time a VBIED had ever been detonated at the gate of an Air Force installation. Nobody was killed (except the driver), and due to the fast response and triage operations of the 157th Security Force members present, the wounded personnel present have fully recovered with no permanent injuries.

You can all rest assured that all is secure in Kirkuk. You can all sleep well at night, because the fight is in Iraq, where it belongs.

Here is a list of the people who volunteered and were hand selected to deploy on this important mission: Master Sgt. Peter Vatistas, Tech. Sgt. Jeffrey Cote, Tech. Sgt. Donald Mullikin, Tech. Sgt. Matthew Schoff, Staff Sgt. Steven Hurst, Staff Sgt. Brian Drake, Senior Airman Daniel Ramos, Senior Airman Jared Booth, Senior Airman Robert Gibson, Senior Airman Andrew Freisinger, Senior Airman Mathew Steer, and Senior Airman Peter Allen.